



## Alameda County Sheriff's Office

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CHARLES C. PLUMMER, SHERIFF

MARSHAL - CORONER - PUBLIC ADMINISTRATOR  
DIRECTOR OF EMERGENCY SERVICES

(510) 272-6866

April 1, 2004

Jim Mayer, Executive Director  
Little Hoover Commission  
925 L Street, Suite 805  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Mayer:

Thank you for inviting the Maximizing Opportunities for Mothers to Succeed (MOMS) Program to testify before the Little Hoover Commission. The plight of incarcerated pregnant and parenting women, and the aftermath of the children left behind is a major factor in the Sheriff's Office dedication to the MOMS Program. I stand ready to assist the commission in any way possible to help facilitate a solution to this ongoing problem. My staff consists of Undersheriff Curtis Watson and Program Director Ms. Elizabeth Belzer who will present a DVD and a packet of information to the commission on the MOMS Program. I would hope with time permitting that my staff will be able to show the MOMS video to the commission because the participants and the children can speak on the benefit of this program better than anyone.

Included with this letter is brief testimony for your review. Please feel free to contact me or my staff if you have any questions in reference to our program.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to share with you the MOMS Program of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "C.C. Plummer".

Charles C. Plummer  
Sheriff-Coroner

CCP/CLW/kh

Little Hoover Commission  
Public Hearing on Women & Parole  
April 22, 2004

Written Testimony  
Alameda County Sheriff's Office

**THE CIRCUMSTANCE AND PROBLEMS THAT LED TO THE  
ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MOMS PROGRAM**

The circumstances leading to the establishment of the MOMS Program began with the Sheriff's Office looking at the needs of perinatal services for women incarcerated in Alameda County. A 1998 analysis of perinatal services data provided a preliminary profile. Over 75% of 339 pregnant women were self-identified as chemically dependent, many with co-occurring mental health problems; close to 80% were repeat offenders, approximately 20% were released homeless, and another 32% were released to relatives, a circumstance that often immediately precedes homelessness. Virtually all were indigent or low-income. The age of pregnant inmates ranged from 18 to 43 years and averaged 29 years. Almost one-fourth (23%) had dependent children under one year of age at the time of pregnancy. It is estimated that a minimum of 40% had one or more dependent children under five years of age at the time of their pregnancy. It was anticipated that a majority of the women to be served by the MOMS Program would have experienced physical abuse or domestic violence in their lives. Comparable data for non-pregnant mothers of young children was expected to be similar. Approximately 60% of pregnant women at Santa Rita Jail were released within one month of incarceration.

The Sheriff's Office originally thought that an in-custody nursery program for women would be able to address the multitude of needs identified for pregnant women. The Sheriff sent a contingent of the Sheriff's Office Staff to Rykers Island, and Bedford Hills Mother Programs. It was determined that the Sheriff's Office did not have an identified need to have an in-custody nursery program. The Sheriff's Office was committed to developing a program that would benefit the pregnant and parenting women incarcerated. Accordingly, the Maximizing Opportunities for Mothers to Succeed (MOMS) Program was born. It started as an intensive month-long program of in-custody services proceeding with a lengthier one-year program of post-release case management, community services, and ongoing follow-up. Today it consists of an eight-week gender responsive topic based curriculum, individual one-year case management services, alumni groups, and continuous follow-up.

The MOMS Program will address a range of systems, resources, and behavioral issues central to the success of incarcerated mothers who seek to re-unite with their families. Release from incarceration constitutes a pivotal juncture in the lives of inmates and their families. In most cases, inmates are released with little money in their pockets and no means of support. Sometimes incarcerated mothers may not even know where their children are when they are released. Often they have no place to call home.

## A DESCRIPTION OF THE IN-CUSTODY AND OUT-OF-CUSTODY PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND THE TYPES OF INMATES SERVED.

The Maximizing Opportunities for Mothers to Succeed (MOMS) program is dedicated to promoting the healthy development of children by increasing capacity of their mothers for self-sufficiency and parent-child bonding. MOMS believes that empowered with new knowledge, treated with respect and dignity, and assisted by community resources, incarcerated women can reverse adverse effects of previous behaviors and life circumstance, build solid foundations to fulfilling futures for themselves and their children, and avoid repeat incarceration. MOMS program activities are designed to maximize prospects for a positive transition to healthy, family-focused and self-sufficient lifestyles previously beyond the capability, aspiration, or circumstances of many incarcerated women.

The MOMS Program combines an intensive gender-responsive curriculum addressing substance abuse, parenting, trauma, life skills, and literacy with ongoing community-based case management and services delivery for one year post-release.

	Helping Women Recover	Helping Women Recover	Parenting	Personal /Life Skills	Group
	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thru.	Fri.
<b>Module 1</b>	Defining Self	Sense of Self	Defining families	Women in Transition the Ongoing Challenge	Healthy Activities & Support Group
<b>Module 2</b>	Self Esteem	Sexism, Racism, and Stigma	Family Systems & Family Development	Stress Management	Healthy Activities & Support Group
<b>Module 3</b>	Family of Origin	Mother's Myth & Mothers	What Are Parents?	The Effects of Violence on Women and Children	Healthy Activities & Support Group
<b>Module 4</b>	A Woman's Way through the Twelve Steps	Interpersonal violence	Children's Emotions	Communication and Relationships	Healthy Activities & Support Group
<b>Module 5</b>	Creating Healthy Relationships and Support Systems	Sexuality and Substance Abuse	Children's Behaviors/ Difficult Behaviors in Children	Helping your Child Become a Successful Reader	Healthy Activities & Support Group
<b>Module 6</b>	Body Image	Sexual Identity	Foster Care Issues	Money Management for a Healthy Lifestyle	Healthy Activities & Support Group
<b>Module 7</b>	Sexual Abuse	Fear of Sex While Clean and Sober	Family reunification	Rental Résumé's and Applications	Healthy Activities & Support Group
<b>Module 8</b>	What is Spirituality	Prayer and Meditation	Reclaiming Parenthood	Career Planning/Dress for Success	Healthy Activities & Support Group

MOMS seeks to address a range of critical, inter-related issues confronting mothers attempting to reunite with their families: limited parenting skills, lack of economic self-sufficiency, multiple family health issues, lack of stable housing, lack of appropriate accessible community assistance, historically adverse personal behaviors, and general lack of support for re-entry into their community. In collaboration with a wide range of community partners, the MOMS program provides gender responsive education, individual and group counseling, housing assistance, vocational/educational assistance, services coordination, and access to an array of post-release services including substance abuse treatment, mental health and physical health services, among others. To date, the program has served 856 incarcerated women (unduplicated count) and 1767 children.

## **PROMINENT CHARACTERISTICS OF MOMS CLIENTS**

Almost one fifth (19%) of MOMS clients are homeless or at high risk of becoming homeless (living doubled up with friends) immediately prior to incarceration. Numerous studies have shown that homelessness severely compromises the health and well-being of young children and their mothers' capacity for successful parenting.

Among 79% of MOMS clients who report having a "drug of choice" at intake, 35% identify crack cocaine or heroin as their preference; only 38% report receiving some form of residential or outpatient substance abuse treatment prior to incarceration.. Long proven to impact pregnancy outcome as well as the perinatal and early childhood health of children, substance abuse problems of mothers will be addressed through a variety of MOMS services.

Histories of physical, emotional or sexual abuse were reported at program intake by the majority of MOMS clients. To date 268 had been physically abused as a child, 252 were abused as an adult, 266 were sexually abused as a child, and 277 were sexually abused as an adult. It is imperative to remember that most of women suffered one or more of these traumas at sometime within their lives. Associated with decreased capacity for successful parenting, untreated trauma has been increasingly recognized by field practitioners and academic researchers alike as a major impediment to family well-being; Only half of MOMS clients had legal custody (sole or joint) of their children prior to incarceration. Family reunification represents a major goal of the proposed project and both the direct and indirect focus of most MOMS Program activities.

## **HOW THE MOMS PROGRAM MOBILIZED SERVICES, AND STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY THE PROGRAM TO SUCCESSFULLY MAINTAIN THE KEY COMMITMENT TO KEY SERVICE PROVIDERS.**

Collaboration with Other Organizations: Since its inception, the MOMS Program has relied on collaboration with community partners in both the design and delivery of its services. A broad-based Advisory Board helped to formulate its preliminary framework

and continues to guide its ongoing implementation. The community-based partner Second Chance, Inc. provides two case managers, Homeless Families Program provides clinical case management supervision, Eden Information & Referral provides a three week Housing Academy, and The Oakland Housing Authority has provided a twelve unit refurbished apartment complex for eligible MOMS clients, and their children culminating in permanent housing. —organizationally lodge MOMS-dedicated staff at Santa Rita jail as case managers, to assist clients while incarcerated and for one year post-release. On an annual basis, the MOMS program has hosted a community wide strategic planning summit to shape, assess effectiveness, and modify program objectives.

## **THE ARRAY OF COMMUNITY-BASED SUPPORT SERVICES WOMEN OFFENDERS NEED.**

Early studies by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency documented intentions of most incarcerated mothers to re-unite with their children upon release from custody.<sup>1</sup> And, while subsequent surveys have confirmed this finding, a notable lack of assistance—in jail facilities, community organizations, and public agencies—continues to threaten the most determined efforts of even highly motivated mothers. As a result, increasing numbers of incarcerated mothers return to custody having failed to acquire either the self-sufficiency or family / community support required for successful re-entry into their communities.

Prominent among the many inter-related barriers—both in and out of custody—to positive rehabilitation of incarcerated mothers are the following:

### **Systems Barriers:**

- Lack of continuity and inter-agency linkages between correctional facilities, outside institutions, public agencies, and community organizations;
- Lack of adequate residential and non-residential substance abuse and mental health treatment programs that accept women with children and/or pregnant women on methadone;
- Lack of access to appropriate substance abuse and mental health treatment;
- Insufficient support for re-entry from community agencies already full to capacity with clients less "difficult to serve;"
- Lack of housing upon release;
- Growing but historically-unpronounced sensitivity within criminal justice systems to cultural, gender, and family-focused issues;
- Loss of public benefits when custody of children is removed;
- Limited resources—physical, financial, and human—within correctional facilities for needed gender-specific programming.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Bloom and David Steinhart, *Why Punish the Children, A Reappraisal of the Children of Incarcerated Mothers in America*, National Council on Crime and Delinquency: San Francisco, 1993.

**Personal / Behavioral Barriers:**

- Insufficient knowledge about trauma, illness, substance abuse, and mental health issues;
- Lack of financial resources;
- Underdeveloped parenting skills;
- Lack of education, vocational training; and job search / retention skills;
- Marginal daily life skills such as the ability to communicate effectively, manage money, resolve conflict, process anger, or plan for the future;
- Mental illness and other co-occurring disorders;
- Low self-esteem and little belief in the future, often resulting from earlier physical, emotional, or sexual abuse;
- Distrust of institutionally-provided care.

Too often, family reunification, mother-child bonding, and achieving wellness become problematic for women leaving jail. Most have limited parenting and independent living skills, marginal or no housing prior to incarceration, lack financial resources, have few prospects for employment, and present with histories of trauma from physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. Many have long-neglected substance abuse problems, unaddressed mental health disorders or co-occurring substance abuse and mental health problems. Engagement with perinatal, primary health care, behavioral health care services and social services is frequently prevented or impeded by competing priorities for basic needs such as food and shelter. Without specialized assistance, mothers often lose custody of their children during incarceration. In many cases, marked decline in the health and well-being of both mothers and their children results. At this time, there is no system of care comparable to MOMS in California or the nation for pregnant and parenting women incarcerated in county jails.

**FUNDING**

The MOMS Program in-custody portion of the MOMS Program is funded by the Sheriff's Office Inmate Welfare Fund. The Inmate Welfare Fund provides the Program Specialist, Program Assistant/Group Case Manager, a Sheriff Technician, 2 Teachers, and 2 Deputy Sheriff's, and the Program Evaluator.

The out-of custody portion of the program is the most critical component of the program and the most difficult to obtain on-going funding for. The Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services Agency has been a partner from the beginning of the program. B.H.C.S. provides the funding necessary to acquire the two case managers from Second Chance Inc. and covers the cost of services. Alameda Public Health has provided funding for the grant writer, and the MOMS Program has received grant funding from Every Child Counts, which has provided the Eden I & R Housing Academy, program support staff, program supplies, furniture and appliances for the Oakland Housing Apartments and the State Legislature for replication of the program Nationwide.

Community-based Organization partners like Second Chance and Eden I & R, are essential to any program intended to provide a transition from custody to community. However, CBO partners are also concerned about recovering the costs associated with the partnership and cannot long sustain involvement with it.

## **REPLICATION**

The MOMS Program has provided replication materials, technician assistance to numerous jurisdictions seeking to develop a similar model of the MOMS Program in their facilities. The MOMS Program has provided workshops nationally for the 2003 American Jail Association Annual Meeting in New Mexico, the Female and Juvenile Offenders Conferences in both Boise Idaho, and recently in Portland Maine. The MOMS Program has published articles in the American Jails Association Magazine, the U.S. Department of Justice National Institute of Corrections Journal of Large Jail Networks, and has been the featured model program in the Center for Innovative Public Policies Gender-Responsive Strategies: Jail Applications.

## **CHALLENGES**

The culture of the criminal justice system is punishment- based. The challenges faced within the criminal justice system were to overcome the barriers of this age-old philosophy. The initial support had to come from the Sheriff. Fortunately, for Alameda County the Sheriff, Charles C. Plummer was open to the exploring the issues consistent with pregnant and parenting women and the effects it has on their children. Under his direction and dedicated Sheriff's staff the challenges that have faced the program had dissipated. Staff training in gender-responsive training is imperative to the success of the program, and the ability to select appropriate and dedicated staff willing to work with incarcerated women.